

# TASTE FOR LITTLE GIRLS DOWNFALL OF SPY CENTRE MOLE

By IAN HENRY *Old Bailey Correspondent*

**G**EOFFREY PRIME, 44, a former employee of the Government's secret communications headquarters at Cheltenham, jailed yesterday for spying for the Russians, was only caught because of his taste for sex with little girls.

After he confessed to three sex attacks police searched his home and discovered "material which suggested he was involved in activities even more grave," said Sir MICHAEL HAVERS, QC, Attorney-General, prosecuting, at the Old Bailey.

In his wallet, they found a code-pad, a document explaining how to handle micro-dots, details of radio frequencies, and a top secret memorandum.

The police also took possession of a powerful radio, two recording tapes, a black briefcase, a carrier bag containing notebooks; and 26 envelopes pre-addressed to East Berlin.

Sir Michael said that in the course of Prime's employment, both in the RAF and in the Government service, he came to have access to information ranging from the simply sensitive to matters of the "very highest" secrecy.

Over a period of 15 years he had admitted passing secrets

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in Berlin, Vienna, Potsdam and London that had caused "exceptional grave damage."

At one stage, the Press and public were excluded for 20 minutes while Sir Michael told the court, in camera, "the deep gravity of what Prime did."

Before doing so, Sir Michael said: "There has been much wild speculation, most of which is unsupported by the evidence about the nature of the damage for which he is responsible, especially in relation to nuclear warheads and endangering the lives of agents."

"I repeat there is no evidence to support speculations of this kind."

## Spying and sex charges

PRIME faced seven spying charges under Section One of the Official Secrets Act.

They were, that for purposes prejudicial to the safety and interest of the State, he communicated information which was calculated to be, might be, or was intended to be, directly or indirectly useful to an enemy:

In Berlin, between Dec. 31, 1967, and Aug., 1968;

Between Sept. 30, 1968 and April 29, 1982;

Between May 1-31, 1970, in Abbey Wood, London;

In Vienna, between Sept. 1-30, 1975;

In Vienna, between May 1-31, 1976;

In Vienna, between May 1-31, 1980;

And in Potsdam, East Germany, between Nov. 1-30, 1981.

Prime also faced three charges of indecently assaulting girls on April 10, 1980; on May 28, 1981, and on April 21, 1982.

Reporting of their names was prohibited by an order under Section 89 of the Children and Young Persons Act.

Secret compartment

in brief case

Prime was first interviewed about his espionage activities in June this year, but he simply told police: "I don't know where you got that information from, but that certainly isn't true, I can assure you."

But he was later more forthcoming. During four hours of questioning he admitted receiving £2,000 from the Russians, but claimed he never got any further than considering working for them.

At a later interview he explained that in September 1977

he had booked flights to Helsinki on two occasions with a view to living in Russia, but his regard for his wife and her children prevented him from going through with the plan.

During that interview with the police, Prime said that in 1974 he had been given, via his sister, a briefcase with a secret compartment containing spying equipment.

The plain black briefcase and its secret compartment were produced in court and the method of opening it, removing two screws in the handle, was demonstrated.

Prime was interviewed twice more, said Sir Michael, but he repeated his denials. Then, there was a "dramatic change."

Suddenly, he told two officers: "Yes, at 4 o'clock today June 26, 1982, I now wish to tell you the whole truth of this tragic affair. I cannot go on talking about my wife whilst I am continuing to tell lies."

"It will take a long time, could we have a short break, then I'll start from January 1968, when this affair started."

The statement which followed was so long it was taken over two days.

Handed a note

at checkpoint

The salient features, which emerged, were that his first contact with Russian agents was not in 1974, but in January, 1968, when he was stationed in Berlin.

"According to that statement Prime began to feel sympathy for the Soviet régime in the mid-60s, and when returning from leave handed a note to a Soviet officer manning a checkpoint into West Berlin indicating that he wished to make contact."

Later he found a metallic cylinder attached to the door of his car. It contained a note directing him to Friedrichstrasse station, where he was met by Russian agents. He explained that he wanted to give them any information they wanted.

"Thereafter Prime met his contacts Igor and Valya regularly until July 1968 when he left the RAF. He told them the nature of his work and revealed all the information which was available to him."

"He used a miniature camera to photograph RAF Gatow's telephone directory and delivered photographs together with a sample of classified material to his Russian controller."

"Prime told his controller that he was thinking of applying for employment as a linguist in the Civil Service and was encouraged to pursue his application."

"He returned to England in July 1968, and was successful in his job application being told to report for duty in London on Sept. 30, 1968."

"Before starting work he returned to East Berlin and received extensive training in the arts of the spy. He was taught the method of secret writing which allows invisible messages in code to be over-written on seemingly innocuous letters."

"He was taught how to use a miniature camera for photographing documents. He was taught how to receive coded radio transmissions and how to receive and handle microdots. He was told the dead letter box procedure for conveying information."

When Prime returned to England he brought with him the briefcase containing the

code pads for deciphering messages sent to him by radio, and to encipher messages sent back to the Russians; secret writing paper on which to write encoded messages; East Germany addressed envelopes to carry the secret messages in invisible code; and £400 sterling.

He was given the codename Rowlands and a password to be used when meeting contacts. In reply to the contact saying: "I believe we met in Pittsburgh in 1968," Prime was to reply: "No, at that time I was in Berlin."

Sir Michael continued: "Once he started work in London, Prime regularly conveyed information to the Russians and received information from them usually by radio.

In autumn 1969, he was told by radio message to go to a secret hiding place in Esher, near a lake. He went, and received a few hundred pounds in sterling and a letter congratulating him on his progress.

In May 1970, he took photographs of documents, which he had taken with the miniature camera, to Abbey Wood in London and left them at a secret hiding place in a wood.

In the summer of 1971, he collected more money and more spying materials at a pick-up point near Banstead Station in Surrey.

### Lost his code pads

"In 1972 or 1973, he mislaid his one-time pads (code pads) and was forced to send a letter to East Germany in invisible writing, in plain text, explaining the loss.

"According to Prime contact was lost until 1974, when Soviet agents left a briefcase at his sister's home. This part of Prime's statement is confirmed by his sister who remembers a man and a woman who spoke in broken English delivering a parcel.

"She opened the parcel and saw the briefcase which was apparently empty. In fact it was the replica of the briefcase Prime had been given in August 1968, and had spying equipment and £400 in the secret compartment.

"In the spring of 1975, whilst still in London, Prime was given a briefing by his employers in order to receive and understand fresh material of a higher security classification. He reported immediately to his controller in East Berlin.

"His controller arranged a series of meetings in Vienna which took place in September 1975. Prime took with him photographic copies of highly secret material and microfiche cards of an equally sensitive nature. He received £700 or £800 in sterling.

"Prime flew to Vienna again in May 1976. Between September 1975 and May 1976 he had been regularly sending details of top secret information. He took with him in May 1976 more photographed documents he had had access to whilst in London, and explained the nature of his new job at

### **Promised pension and rank of colonel**

"He had, in fact, been transferred from London to Cheltenham in March 1976. At one of the meetings in Vienna in May 1976, Prime was informed that should he ever wish to defect he would be given a pension and the rank of Colonel. He was given £1,000 before he returned to England.

"Prime was promoted in 1976, and on the first of November 1976 he became section head, which gave him access to a wider and even more secret range of material.

"As a section head he regularly attended meetings at which matters of the utmost secrecy were discussed.

"Between his return from Vienna in May 1976 and his resignation on Sept. 28, 1977, Prime took 15 rolls of film amounting to about 500 photographs of top secret documents.

"Prime claimed that by September 1977, the pressure of living a double life got too much for him. He had married in June 1977 and taken over the care of his new wife's three children.

"He decided to defect by flying to Helsinki, and indeed booked flights on Sept. 11 and



✓ Sir Michael Hayers, Q.C.

Sept. 20, but on each occasion did not go through with it.

"According to Prime he had no further contact with Russian agents until he was telephoned in April, 1980, and asked to go to Vienna.

"He flew there on May 16 1980, taking with him the 15 rolls of film of top secret documents, together with handwritten notes.

### **Debriefed on cruise ship**

"He was taken to a Russian cruise ship on the Danube for two or three days and questioned at length about the material he had brought with him. He was given £600 and flew back to England.

"In October, Prime claimed that he was again contacted by telephone and agreed to go to Berlin for a further meeting. He flew to Berlin on Nov. 16 and was taken to Potsdam in East Germany where he was closely questioned about Allied activities which were top secret.

"When the debriefing was finished he was given £4,000 and taken back to Berlin.

"Prime indicated that the one time pads and the secret writing pads which the police had seized were given to him either in Vienna in 1980 or at Potsdam in 1981.

"He claimed he had not used any of them, nor had he had any further contact with Russian agents."

Sir Michael said Prime ended his statement saying: "Looking back over the entire period I deeply regret the extent of the betrayal manifested by my activities, which were in breach of the trust placed in me by my Government."

"I believe that I first embarked on these activities partly as a result of a misplaced idealistic view of Soviet socialism which was compounded by basic psychological problems within myself.

"These problems had made me susceptible to the type of propaganda which I became aware of during my service in West Berlin.

"I am also deeply ashamed and find it difficult to express my remorse in words in relation to the anguish and suffering which I have caused for my wife and family."

**Police investigation****'masterly'**

Before requesting the court to go into camera, Sir Michael paid tribute to the officers of West Mercia police who interviewed Prime.

"The responsible services have nothing but praise for the masterly way in which Det. Chief Supt. David Cole, Det. Chief Insp. Peter Picken and police officers under them coped with what is the gravest investigation they will ever be likely to undertake. In an unfamiliar field, they worked with remarkable diligence and very great care."

Lord LANE, Lord Chief Justice, interrupted by asking the Attorney-General: "The information this man gave became more and more important and dangerous to the services of this country. Is that true?"

Sir Michael agreed that it became more true as Prime's spying career continued.

Earlier the Attorney-General said it was clear from the charges, and from Prime himself, he was sexually attracted towards girls in the 10 to 15 age bracket.

"Over a number of years, he built up a card index system of young girls. His main sources of information were newspapers from the Hereford and Gloucester area.

"From newspapers he was able to find out the names of the girl, the names of her parents and sometimes the home telephone number.

"Armed with this informa-



Mr George Carman, Q.C.

tion it was then his practice to telephone the girl and engage her in conversation as to her age, which school she attended, and when her parents were likely to be out of the house.

"He maintained his index system, logging every call he made, with details of who answered the telephone and if it was the girl, details of what their conversation had been about, and what name he had used when making the call."

At the time of his arrest, Prime gave police 2,287 index cards for such girls.

But Prime only visited the homes of his victims on four occasions. One visit in March 1982 to the home of a girl near Worcester was abortive because when he got to the house he found a cleaning lady there.

The first time he actually got into his victim's home was in April, 1980. Prime telephoned the home of an 11-year-old Gloucestershire girl and spoke to her about her family and school. He rang again 10 minutes later and asked to visit the house to do some plumbing.

He arrived five minutes later and the girl showed him the loft. He pulled a hood of striped pyjama material over his head, placed his hand over her mouth and told her to lie down. When she got up, he said: "Lie down or I'll do something to you."

After Prime said he wanted to look up her skirt, he was disturbed by a market researcher knocking at the door, and left hurriedly.

His second victim was a 15-year-old Worcestershire girl. He again telephoned the girl, knowing her parents both worked, this time posing as a painter and decorator.

After pretending to examine the house, he asked to take a photograph of her on the pretext that he had once been her baby-sitter. But the girl refused.

She noticed through a door that he was tying a handkerchief over his face. He seized her by the neck and said "if you co-operate with me you won't get hurt."

He twisted her arm behind her back and pushed her into a bedroom. She asked to go to the bathroom, where she opened a window and tried to call for help.

Prime threw her into the bath, putting his hands over her face and later around her neck. She was ordered to take off her jeans and sit on the floor and expose herself.

The third victim was a 14-year-old girl living near Hereford, when, in April this year, he again telephoned asking to do some painting estimates.

Once at her home he threatened the girl with a bottle opener with a knife blade. She was ordered to pull her pants down and lift up her skirt, but after she began screaming Prime fled, but not before asking if she knew any other girls on their own.

Sir Michael said Prime's distinctively coloured Cortina car had been spotted at the scene of the Hereford incident, and when police began questioning all Cortina owners, Prime denied any knowledge of the incident, claiming he had been at home at the time.

"It seems that after the police left his home he confessed to his wife that he was responsible, for the next day he telephoned Hereford police station and admitted he was the man police were looking for."

When the court came out of camera Mr George Carman, Q.C. defence counsel, told the Lord Chief Justice:

"My client may now be able to see that a civilised system of justice affords him the right to be properly defended in a country whose interests he has damaged, whereas the irony of the case is that the country



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whose interests he sought to serve would have denied him such rights."

Dealing with what he described as matters of the "greatest public importance," Mr Carman emphasised that Prime's espionage activities were conducted by him in collusion with the Russian Intelligence services alone.

No other colleague at GCHQ, or indeed any other citizen of Britain or any Western power was in any way involved, directly or indirectly in his activities.

"Having betrayed his country and confessed his guilt freely, he expressly authorises me to state that he is anxious to co-operate after sentence with the authorities in furnishing any further information that he possibly can in any subsequent interviews that may be sought, so that the task of repairing the damage should be continued.

"So much for public matters. A matter of private concern, but no less important in your lordship's court, is the utter shame and profound remorse that he would wish me to express to the children concerned and to their parents."

### *'What kind of man is he?'*

Mr Carman said that if one stood back with horror at the offences, in order to take a close look at the offender, one asked the question: "What kind of man is Geoffrey Prime?"

Two phrases told it all— "desperately lonely and totally inadequate," and "a sexual and social misfit."

"It is the misfits of society that provide the fertile breeding ground for the ruthless propaganda of the Soviet system and its capacity to foster treachery under the guise of idealism."

Mr Carman said a cynic might add "perfectly wicked," and one had to concede that to be true in terms of Prime's conduct.

"But it is not the key to understanding the man himself," he said.

At 30 years of age, Prime had betrayed his country while serving in the RAF, at the beginning of 1968.

"That was a considered decision. One naturally asks how and why did he reach that decision," said Mr Carman.

When one looked back, the picture that was presented of Prime was of an unhappy and unfortunate childhood, where he had been deprived of parental love. His parents' marriage was unhappy and he himself was the victim of a sexual assault by an adult relative.

When Prime joined the RAF he was already encountering

serious sexual problems. His mother died that year and his father when he was 25.

"What your lordship does not already know is that in 1972, whilst employed on work of a sensitive nature, he was referred by his general practitioner to a consultant psychiatrist for severe depression."

Mr Carman described Prime's unhappy and unfortunate background, his sexual maladjustment and social isolation which, he said had led to his position.

"When he was in the RAF in Berlin he lost his parents and religious belief. He was sexually inadequate. In his own words: 'I needed to believe in something'."

"He started to listen to Russian broadcasts and read Russian literature. He was, in his mind, converted to the cause at that time."

In the following nine years, said Mr Carman, Prime had "clung" to the idea that he had made the right decision.

"But they were nine years also where his doubts began to torment him with ever increasing intensity."

### *End of marriage 'the watershed'*

Prime married in 1969, but the marriage failed in 1972. He had psychiatric treatment during this period for depression. The watershed came when he left his wife.

Then Prime met his present wife and went to lodge at her home. "She had a tragic marriage with three young sons. Prime married her in the summer of 1977 and then voluntarily and very abruptly resigned his post at Cheltenham in September of that year.

"The pressure which built up in him caused him to resign and consider taking steps to defect to the Soviet Union twice."

Mr Carman invited Lord Lane not to consider Prime as a totally ruthless and rationally motivated spy. He pointed out that he had an opportunity to defect to the Soviet Union when he resigned from Cheltenham and failed to do so.

Also, unlike some of the major post-war spies including Philby, Burgess and Maclean, there was not in Prime's case any pre-arranged escape plan or route with the Russians.

He had no false passport and every trip abroad was carried out using his real passport.

Lord Lane intervened: "Did he really need one?"

Mr Carman replied: "If he went to places like Vienna, it may have been likely for the Russians to have provided him with a false passport."

Mr Carman said the final reason for not treating Prime as

a ruthless traitor was that when he was arrested and interviewed about the sex offences on April 27 this year, "a critical date in this case," he then freely, within a few hours confessed two things to his wife.

### *Ignored chance to defect*

He told her he was guilty of grave sexual misconduct; more startlingly, he told her he had been engaged in spying.

When he knew he was a police suspect for serious sexual offences, he had a passport, money and a car, and could have defected from this country. But he did not, said counsel.

"For on that day, and for the remaining three weeks, the authorities were totally unaware the man suspected of sexual activities was also a spy."

"This man was not a potentially ruthless and not a totally rationally motivated spy."

He confessed to his wife on the evening of April 27, and the following day telephoned the police admitting the sexual offences. In the intervening three weeks Mrs Prime agonised with herself what she should do.

In the meantime, she found a carrier bag containing spy equipment and a wallet containing documents under a bed. She took advice from her solicitor, from her doctor and from her parents, all of whom advised her that the matter should be reported.

Mr Carman said Prime had lied to police because he knew that even if he was imprisoned for the sexual offences, any term would leave him a lifeline to see his wife and stepchildren eventually.

Prime had described in great detail his recruitment and training by the Russians, and had also described the Russian Intelligence service to police.

He had told quite voluntarily of the payments he had received and the times on which the Russians had made contact.

"He gave the British authorities every possible co-operation in enabling them to try to understand the gravity of what he had done and assess the damage that he had perpetrated."

Mr Carman added: "His paymasters did not think so highly of him that they had arranged for his escape."

Again Lord Lane interrupted, saying: "He was much more valuable here."

Counsel said Prime had no access to fresh information from the autumn of 1977 when he left Cheltenham. Although he went to Potsdam in 1981 and was interviewed by Russian

Intelligence, they were technical questions, and he was unable to help them.

"Persistent attempts were made by the Russians to encourage him to try to rejoin the Government services at Cheltenham or the Army. They even tried to persuade him to try to join the Security Services. But once having made the decision to resign, he made absolutely no effort to rejoin again."

Mrs Rhona Prime, 37, who went to police as a matter of conscience, told the court: "I took legal advice and I had a choice, I didn't have to do it."

"But morally I had to go to the authorities and tell them, because I could not live as a Christian with that on my conscience, or my husband's conscience. And I believe, in the end, I have done him a favour, and hopefully the country."

Prime looked visibly stunned as Lord Lane sentenced him to a total of 38 years in prison.

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## 'A ruthless operator, says judge

**LORD LANE**, the Lord Chief Justice, told Prime:

"I have listened to what has been said of your early history and the background of social and sexual isolation which you had, and of course, all this made you an ideal prospect for our potential enemies."

Lord Lane said he had also listened "perhaps more importantly" to what Prime's wife said on his behalf.

"Whatever has come out of this case, your wife has come out of it with great credit. She displays herself as a woman of great character, sympathy and humanity."

He went on: "But the court has heard enough about your activities over at least nine years as I read it, probably longer, to realise that by your treachery you have done incalculable harm to the interests and security of this country and the interests and security of our friends and allies."

No one would ever know for certain what exactly motivated Prime. "It may have been what you have doubtless called ideological reasons."

Lord Lane said he had been



The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane.

asked by Mr Carman not to treat Prime as a ruthless and rationally motivated spy.

"But I am bound to say that it is a description which fits you exactly. Your ruthlessness is demonstrated not only by what you did with this country's secrets, but by what you did to those girls."

"The fact that you were rationally motivated is quite clear on the statements you made to police."

"What your motivation was perhaps doesn't matter. You made the choice and you must suffer the result."

Lord Lane told Prime he was giving him credit for having confessed, for pleading guilty, and for largely providing the material on which the prosecution was based.

"It is said you are anxious to repair the damage you have done. But it is perfectly plain that the huge proportion of it is quite irrevocable."

"You must suffer the result of the choice you have made. The result is to punish you, mark the public abhorrence of the crimes you have committed, and finally to deter others who might toy with the idea of treachery in the future."

"As you gained in stature and promotion in your job, so you became of greater use to the Russians, and that is the basis on which I sentence you."

Prime, of Pitville Crescent, Cheltenham, was jailed for a total of 35 years after he pleaded guilty to the seven spying charges.

He was jailed for a further three years, making a total of 38 years, for the indecent assaults on the three young girls.